

HEARING CARE FOR FEDERAL  
EMPLOYEES ACT

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 7, 1997*

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation which will cover audiology services for Federal employees.

This legislation requires Federal health benefit insurance carriers to guarantee direct access to, and reimbursement for, audiologist-provided hearing care services when hearing care is covered under a Federal health benefit plan.

As my colleagues may be aware, the Federal Government already allows direct access to services provided by optometrists, clinical psychologists, and nurse midwives, yet fails to allow direct access to services provided by audiologists in Federal health benefit plans covering hearing care services.

It is not my intention to expand the services which can be provided by audiologists, but instead to only allow audiologists to provide what they are already licensed to do under State laws—and no more.

Currently the consumers of audiology services are people with hearing loss and related conditions. In fact, there are an estimated 28 million people in the United States—about 1 in every 10—who are affected by hearing loss. This number is expected to increase to over 40 million people during the next 10 to 20 years, as our national population continues to age.

Moreover, it is worth noting that many private health insurers model their benefits packages after the Federal employee health benefit plan. Accordingly, this bill will also provide important indirect benefits to millions of Americans with hearing loss, who are not Federal employees.

I urge my colleagues to cosponsor the Hearing Care for Federal Employees Act and support freedom of choice to the patient while providing swift and timely access to hearing care.

HON. RICHARD E. NEAL

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 7, 1997*

Mr. NEAL of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, today I introduced legislation to correct an inequity in our current tax system. Under current law, an individual over the age of 55 is allowed a one-time exclusion of capital gain on the sale of a principal residence. This one-time exclusion invokes a marriage penalty. This legislation would eliminate the marriage penalty for the one-time exclusion of gain on the sale of a principal residence.

For example, two individuals over the age of 55 who decide to marry and sell their homes would only receive an exclusion for \$125,000. Whereas, if they did not marry and sold their homes they each would be able to receive an exclusion for \$125,000. This legislation addresses this problem. The legislation eliminates the marriage penalty by disregarding elections made before the date of marriage or

elections made on homes sold after the date of marriage, but purchased before the marriage.

Fairness is an important element of tax policy. The current policy on the one-time exclusion assists individuals who are approaching retirement and it is a valuable exclusion. Our Tax Code should be fair and not discriminate against basic values such as marriage. The decision to marry should not be based on financial reasons.

I urge you to correct this inequity and support this legislation.

INTRODUCTION OF THE SIKES ACT  
IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENTS OF  
1997: JANUARY 7, 1997

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 7, 1997*

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this legislation to reauthorize and improve the effectiveness of the act of September 15, 1960, commonly referred to as the Sikes Act.

Since coming to Congress in 1973, I have led the fight to enhance and conserve the vital fish and wildlife resources that exist on our military lands. The Department of Defense [DOD] manages nearly 25 million acres at approximately 900 military bases nationwide. These lands contain a wealth of plant and animal life, they provide vital habitat for thousands of migratory waterfowl and they are home for nearly 100 Federally listed species.

The Department does a superb job of training our young men and women for combat. Regrettably, they often fail to do even an adequate job of comprehensive natural resource management planning. At far too many installations, management plans have never been written, are outdated, or are largely ignored. Furthermore, when these plans do exist, all too often they are not coordinated or integrated with other military activities.

While this bill will make a number of improvements in the Sikes Act, it does not undermine in any way the fundamental training mission of a military base.

What the bill does is expand the scope of existing conservation plans to encompass all natural resource management activities, require management plans for all appropriate installations, mandate an annual report summarizing the status of these plans, require that trained personnel be available, and ensure that DOD shall manage each installation to provide for the conservation of fish and wildlife, and to allow the multipurpose uses of those resources. In addition, the bill extends the act's authorization for the next 3 years at half of its previous funding level.

Mr. Speaker, this is a noncontroversial bill. In fact, during the last Congress, it was thoroughly considered by both the House Resources and National Security Committees. It was approved by the House of Representatives unanimously by voice vote on July 11, 1995.

Regrettably, the other body took no action on this measure. While I am today introducing a bill that is identical to the one that was overwhelmingly adopted by the House, I am committed to reauthorizing this longstanding con-

servation measure. With that in mind, I intend to meet with representatives of the Departments of Defense and the Interior, the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and members of the House National Security Committee. I am confident that together we can develop a strong and effective reauthorization bill.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans, JIM SAXTON, for joining with me in this effort and I commend the Sikes Act Improvement Amendments of 1997 to the membership of the House of Representatives.

PUBLIC HOUSING TENANT  
INTEGRITY ACT OF 1997

HON. JOE KNOLLENBERG

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 7, 1997*

Mr. KNOLLENBERG. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Public Housing Tenant Integrity Act of 1997. This bill amends section 6103 of the Internal Revenue Code and section 904 of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Amendment Act to allow the Housing and Urban Development Administration [HUD] to fight fraud and abuse that has developed when public housing tenants fail to fully disclose or update their income.

As we move into the 21st century, budgetary constraints will continue to limit non-defense discretionary spending. Public housing is not immune from these constraints. Though Congress and HUD have taken steps to prepare housing for the future, there is still room for improvement. One area I believe we can make substantial inroads is to eliminate fraud and abuse. By aggressively attacking existing fraud and abuse, we can squeeze every dollar appropriated for public housing and direct it effectively to those most in need. We can also assure the American taxpayer that tenants pay their fair share.

As most of you know, when an individual applies for public housing, the key qualification is income. An applicant who meets the income requirement is required to pay rent equal to 30 percent of their income. The taxpayer subsidizes the rest. Unfortunately, housing agencies do not have independent sources to verify the applicant's wage and income data, even if the housing agency suspects the individual underreported income. Moreover, the system encourages residents to underreport their income when they apply for housing.

Despite the lack of a nationwide study, HUD has estimated the abuse at \$300 million annually. Further, the General Accounting Office [GAO] issued a 1992 report that found unreported income abuse could be as high as 21 percent. Others have projected a reasonable estimate between 5 and 10 percent which is consistent with other Federal benefit programs. Whatever the number, fighting this abuse and stopping individuals who defraud the Federal Government is a commonsense goal.

Congress, HUD, and others have long recognized the need to address this particular problem and in 1988 Congress passed the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Amendments Act. The McKinney Act provided State agencies with the authority to disclose